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ABSTRACT

The New Brunswick Writing Assessment Program implemented in grades five, eight, and eleven in New Brunswick (Canada) public schools in 1978 is described in this report, which includes the specific assignments for each grade, a discussion of the general holistic scoring approach used, and characteristics of the responses at each grade, including examples. Information on the analytical scoring of a subset of responses includes comparison with scores from a similar study conducted in 1977 and information on the following items by grade: score, length in words, paragraphing percentage, words per T-unit, words per clause, clauses per T-unit, run-ons per T-unit, fragments per T-unit, nonagreements per clause, incorrect verb forms per clause, faulty pronoun reference per T-unit, case errors per clause, adjective adverb confusion per clause, and spelling error percentage. Other comparisons are given for differences among various level students and between high scoring and low scoring responses. The final section contains implications for curriculum and instruction. (MKM)

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THE NEW BRUNSWICK WRITING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

THE LANGUAGE OF GROWTH

BY

BRYAN ROBERTS, CHIEF READER

September, 1979

An independent report of a study
administered and funded by the Evaluation Branch
New Brunswick Department of Education

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PREFACE

I have entitled this report The Language of Growth because I believe that the concept of growth, of the maturation which occurs as students move through the school system, is the most important concept with which the teaching profession has to come to terms at present. Our inability to recognize and define growth in language performance is probably the most serious impediment to improving curriculum and instruction, and it is also the basis of our insecurity when we are confronted by a dissatisfied, even hostile, general public.

This public is often one which seeks to impose supposedly adult standards on the writing abilities of students who, by virtue of their age and inexperience, are non-adult. Unfortunately, within our own system, with its still tightly organized grade structure, the same inclination persists. Moreover, these unrealistic (and frequently irrelevant) adult standards are usually directed at purely cosmetic or, at best, very limited aspects of writing performance. And, within the profession, when we have tried to define 'expectations' at various grade levels, we have done so, and continue to do so, largely in terms of the limited and sometimes superficial indices which we can name and count - spelling errors, usage errors, punctuation errors, and a number of syntactic and rhetorical 'skills' which are susceptible to objective analysis.

The comparatively recent work of researchers, and the advent of computers, have enabled us to extend our capacities for objective analysis of writing, especially in terms of vocabulary and syntax. Nevertheless it may be salutary to remind ourselves that even when we subject student writing to intensive analysis of this kind, as we have done in the New Brunswick Writing Assessment Program, we are able to account for only one third of the factors which appear to influence the mark awarded by holistic scorers, and that, of these factors, length of composition is comfortably the most significant predictor of score.

I have called this report The Language of Growth because I believe that what we need to work towards is a language which will describe, not simply the narrow areas of growth which we can already label, but, as far as it can hope to be achieved, the whole process of composition as it develops through the years, the long years, of cognitive maturation.

The Writing Assessment Program in New Brunswick provides an opportunity for teachers to work towards an understanding and a description of this process. I say 'for teachers' advisedly because, thanks to the insight of the Provincial Director of Evaluation and his colleagues, there is no teacher in the province who has not had the opportunity to be fully informed of and to participate in the program which is now entering its third year of operation.

This report will, I hope, raise more questions than it answers. I hope, too, that some of the answers at least will be valid and the questions purposeful.

In concluding I should like to acknowledge my deep debt to the many teachers with whom I have worked in compiling this report, to Dr. Cary Grobe, who has led me patiently through the labyrinths of statistics, and to my colleagues, John DeLong and Gerry Hawkes, whose support has been unfailing.

Bryan Roberts

June 1979

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INTRODUCTION

The Writing Assessment Program implemented in grades 5, 8 and 11 in New Brunswick public schools in 1978 was modelled on the program which had been initiated the previous year. The program was again administered in the fall in the hope that both the results and the attendant in-service work would prove currently beneficial to teachers and students. It comprised batteries of criterion referenced tests of skills judged by teachers to be significant, and a writing component at each of the three grade levels. All tests were designed and selected by committees of practising teachers. This report will deal only with the writing components.

The writing program was less ambitious than in the previous year in that the assignments were restricted to a single mode of composition. Mainly in order to complement the previous year's analytical study, the mode chosen was transactional in grades 8 and 11, and expressive/narrative in grade 5.

The size of the sample, however, was increased to 1180 in grade 11, 1466 in grade 8, and 1348 in grade 5 - representing a random sample of over 10% of the student population. The size of the sub-sample used for the detailed analysis of syntax, usage, and mechanics was increased threefold.

The Assignments

The grade 5 assignment required students to write a letter to a friend. The assignment read:

> 'A classmate has moved to another school. Since that time, something interesting has taken place at your school. Write a letter to this student describing the event.' (Time allowed - 30 minutes).

The situation appeared to be one with which all students could identify, and all appeared at ease with the audience provided. Rather interestingly, students by and large showed more ability to concentrate on a single incident than the designers of the assignment had anticipated, though many, as might be expected, produced a catalogue of happenings.

The grade 8 assignment also required students to write a letter. The instructions read:

> 'You learn that one of your favourite T.V. shows is in danger of being cancelled. Write a letter to your local T.V. station manager in which you try to persuade him that the show should continue.' (Time allowed - 30 minutes).

Most students had no difficulty in selecting a favourite T.V. show and in advancing reasons (if somewhat naive reasons) for its continuance. (Sociologically, incidentally, the letters constitute a rather alarming document).

The audience, on the other hand, presented difficulties. Most students dealt with the problem of their anonymity by treating the station manager as an adult in whose reasonableness and compassion they could place some trust, though a few clearly concluded that nothing less than intimidation, blackmail or bribery would save their show. On the whole, students addressed themselves adequately if somewhat awkwardly to the task.

The grade 11 assignment was designed to provide a degree of overlap with grade 8, though the wording was changed in order to invite a more abstract approach:

> 'You learn that a popular T.V. show is in danger of being cancelled. It is considered unsuitable for family viewing. Write a letter to your local T.V. station manager in which you make clear your own position on this issue and attempt to influence his final decision.' (Time allowed - 30 minutes).

The wording 'a popular T.V. show' and 'on this issue' succeeded in its intention in that the majority of students did address themselves to one or several of the moral implications, (though, of course, they might had done this even without the explicit invitation). A few students responded at what might be described as the typical grade 8 level and could present little more than a head-count of their friends and neighbours who liked the show. Conversely a few grade 8 students did approach their assignment at a more abstract level.

The wording of the question may have proved an equivocal success however, in that an appreciable number of students failed to identify a specific show and conducted their argument without any specific terms of reference. Scorers were requested not to award an automatic penalty for this 'fault' but, rather, to assess the absence of concreteness on the total impact of the letter.

Another possible weakness in the wording of the assignment was the use of the phrase 'in danger of', which implies that the writer of the letter either favours violence and explicit sexual references on T.V. or is opposed to censorship. The assignment, in other words, is loaded. A few students of strong conviction were undeterred and roundly denounced the corrupting influence of the C.B.C., but others may have been constrained to adopt an unnatural point of view. The point here is not so much to criticize the item as to draw attention to the great care which all of us, as teachers, need to exercise when designing assignments.

As might be expected, grade 11 students were much more comfortable and confident in addressing themselves to the audience than were students in grade 8; indeed, superior responses showed real authority and composure.

The Holistic Scoring

The compositions were scored holistically in workshop sessions involving approximately sixty teachers and administrators. Scoring was on a scale of 1-4 and each composition was scored twice. Splits of more than one point were arbitrated by a third reader. Complete anonymity of both students and scorers was ensured and the process was monitored in order to reduce the effect of erratic scoring.

In accord with the chief reader's belief that holistic scoring should be, as far as possible, a self-contained exercise aimed simply at achieving a tacit consensus of judgment, no attempt was made to prescribe explicit criteria. Sufficient sample readings were carried out to ensure that the group could achieve a reasonable consensus and to assist scorers in establishing a sense of scale. After that, the process relied on the soundness and consistency of individual judgments.

Such a system clearly has weaknesses and limitations. However, it is probably more efficient for the purpose than one which attempts to prescribe a number of closed criteria. Just as, in the wording of the assignments, no constraints other than purpose and audience were imposed, so, in the evaluation, teachers were constrained only by the request to bear in mind the intent and rhetorical occasion of the composition.

It should perhaps be re-stated that in this kind of scoring there are no absolute criteria; the responses are simply classified in relation to each other in the sample. In the event, the same number of splits (around 5%) and the distribution of scores indicated that the scoring was balanced and consistent.

The following tables summarize the results at the three grade levels. The scores represent the combined mark awarded by the two scorers - minimum 2/8, maximum 8/8.

GRADE 5

Combined score	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL
Absolute frequency	104	148	260	260	232	206	138	1348
Relative frequency %	7.7	11.0	19.3	19.3	17.2	15.3	10.2	100

Mean score 5.141 Std. deviation 1.736

Mean score awarded by first scorers: 2.589

Mean score awarded by second scorers: 2.552

GRADE 8

Combined score	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL
Absolute frequency	137	184	281	314	234	189	127	1466
Relative frequency %	9.3	12.6	19.2	21.4	16.0	12.9	8.7	100

Mean score: 4.954 Std. deviation 1.729

Mean score awarded by first scorers: 2.456

Mean score awarded by second scorers: 2.499

GRADE 11

Combined score	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL
Absolute frequency	62	112	216	273	205	203	108	1180
Relative frequency %	5.4	9.5	18.3	23.1	17.4	17.2	9.2	100

Mean score: 5.258 Std. deviation: 1.637

Mean score awarded by first scorers: 2.671

Mean score awarded by second scorers: 2.674

These mean scores approximated closely the mean scores achieved on the performance of similar (but not identical) rhetorical tasks in 197 .

COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES 1977/1978

	Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 11
1977	4.828	5.139	5.134
1978	5.141	4.954	5.258

In grade 11 a further analysis was made in order to compare the performance of students enrolled in English 111 and 112 with those enrolled in English 113. The sample, which was a valid reflection of the provincial enrollment, demonstrated, as might be expected, that the mean performance of 113 students was significantly lower (4.770) than that of 112 and 111 students (5.701). However, as in 1977, there was considerable overlapping.

RELATIVE FREQUENCY OF SCORES OF 111/112-113 STUDENTS

Combined score	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL
Relative frequency 111/112	1.6	5.5	14.2	22.0	22.0	24.4	10.2	100%
Relative frequency 113	8.0	14.9	19.5	25.3	19.5	8.0	4.5	100%

Mean score 111/112: 5.701

Mean score 113: 4.770

Characteristics of responses

In order to give these facts and figures some qualitative value, this report will try to describe and illustrate some of the features which characterize what the scorers agreed to be 4, 3, 2 and 1 level responses.

It must be emphasized that the responses printed in the following section are not 'perfect' examples of their level; they simply reflect some of the qualities which may have influenced the decision of the scorers. In particular, the score of 4 example is not necessarily the 'best' response which was read nor the score of 1 example the 'worst'.

GRADE 5

The following response was scored as 1 by two readers:

Address given

Dier _____

We are going to have a play at school it is going to be about 4 things one of the things are about cindrela and the the 3 step mothers who awas bos cinedrela a rowd and after that ther will be the 2 bears and a cub then the next one will be about chrismes and how sataclos gets the prests in and at last the last one of all is how the whihe lost her Brom and the plas will be ofer

The following response was scored as 2 by two readers:

No address given

Dear _____ since you moved I have got two new friend here at school thair names are P_____ and E_____. And we also got new swings and a mary goround, monky bars, perel bars and billy goat bridge here at the school. Did you know that one of my best frends won for the funest costum at the Halloween party. well its time to say good by for now see you later.

your friend,

_____

The following response was scored as 3 by two readers:

Address given

Dear _____,

A few days after you left. There was track and field run, and I went. And when I got there was a big croud of peope and kids. Then I went up to the starting line with all the other kids and then they said go, and the race was on. I was in 9 place. As I was going around the corner A big guy pushed me and I fell. As I got up I looked at my arm and it was scraped to pieces. But I still got up and I was off. A little while later I saw the

finish line and past just about everyone, the only guy I didn't pass was _____ but he tripped, so I ran as fast as I could and I won. Well I hope you have a good time at your new school. So long pal.

Your friend,

_____

The following response was scored as 4 by two readers:

Address given

Dear _____

How are you. Yesterday we had our winter carnivail. We had a really good time at the rink. There was a hockey game _____ against _____. _____ won the game and we had some races. Then the was a game against the mothers. After we got to the school there was a hot dog sale and the hot dogs were twenty five cents and you get a free drink. Then we went back to the rink and we had some more races. Some of them were really close. I didn't win any but R____ and J____ and M_____ won some. The hockey games I was talking about a while ago, R _____ and M_____ got most of the scores for the _____ team. J _____ didn't let any of the shots buy him. That game they were really good. The score was six to one for _____. You should of

seen the mothers play _____. It was really funny. The mothers were always falling down on the ice. The score was a tie. It was seven seven. Then we had to go back to the school. There we play some games and they were really fun. Well I have to say good-bye.

Yours truly,

_____

These examples illustrate not only the range of performance but the difficulties experienced by the readers when making their judgments - and, of course, these illustrations can only begin to indicate the rich variety of responses with which the readers were confronted. However, many teachers would probably agree that these responses have been ranked relative to each other, in a responsible kind of way.

In terms of the assignment, while the story of 'Cinedrela' and her three step mothers is hard to resist, the first response does not describe 'something interesting which has taken place at school' nor does it reveal any real sense of audience. The second response also strays from the assigned topic but does exhibit a strong immediate sense of the friend to whom the student is writing. By contrast the third writer has only a very perfunctory sense of audience (although the letter format is carefully observed) but he does have a

sense of drama of the event and can convey it in his language. The response scored 4 shows both a sustained awareness of the friend and a feeling for the interest of the event described in the letter, even if the recollection is somewhat disorganized.

The responses do graduate themselves to some extent in terms of mechanical accuracy, particularly spelling, usage and (though it is not reproduced here) handwriting. However, it cannot be emphasized too strongly (as the later section of this report on syntax and mechanics will show) that these factors are far from paramount. In spite of cosmetic differences, all four of the responses printed here reveal a sure sense of language structure. If, for example, one filters out spelling and punctuation errors in the response which was scored as 1 and reads it aloud, one discovers that it reads fluently and naturally and accomplishes a rather effective climax.

GRADE 8

The following response was scored as 1 by two readers:

No address given

Dear Sir,

Please continue on with the tv show that you were going to cancell. It is my favorite show. I know allot of people who like the show very much. It rankes the highest in my favorites list. Please return it to the air, if not allot of peoples hearts will be broken.

Sincerly yours,

The following response was scored as 2 by two readers:

No address given

Dear Manager:

I have heard that the show Waverly Wonders is being cancelled. But why? It is a nice and funny show and lots of people like it too.

I was hoping that this was not true, but I geuss it is and am I really disappointed. I wish that I could persuade you not to cancell it, but I geuss you have reasons for cancelling the show.

I do not want that show to go off the air because I really like it alot. Please, I do not wish that that show goes off the air, please think about it for awhile and think hard please, because I want that show to stay on the air, and so do my friends. Lots of other people like that show to, even adults you know. Before I go I'd wish that you would think about this for awhile, Please.

I hope that you get around to reading this. Thanks anyway

Sincerly

The following response was scored as 3 by two readers:

No address given

Dear Station Manager,

I think that the T.V. show should stay on the air because it learns people not do do alot of bad things that they might be doing now. When they see that you don't get a way with stealing or breaking windows etc.

Another thing why the show shouldn't go off the air is, because alot of people that I know always watch it every week.

Another thing is when the cops always get the bad guys people just say it's just a movie, but it is usually true about the cops getting their man.

People probably think there is to much violence in it, but I think a show should have violence in it, so there would be more action in it. If you told me a cop show with no violence in it I would eat my hat. Look at hockey, there is alot of violence in it, but people don't say nothing about it, because they like seeing violence in hockey, just like I like hockey, so I'm just like them.

If there wasn't any violence in cops shows it wouldn't be any good, because it wouldn't be like the real thing. There is violence in real life, so the cop movies are just showing you what it's like out on the streets.

So if your taking Starsky and Hutch off the air your making a big mistake

yours sincerely

The following response was scored as 4 by two readers:

Nov. 2, 1978

Dear Mr. manager.

I have just been informed that my favorite television show, Mork & Mindy, is in danger of being cancelled. All I want to ask you is why?? I talked to alot of kids about this and they are quite upset too. Many parents enjoy watching that show also. It is a very good show. It's very funny but it also has its moments of sadness and love. That is one of the many reasons people like watching that show.

Another reason you shouldn't cancell Mork & Mindy is because of Mork & Mindy themselves. They are very good actors. They have expressive faces and they make the show seem real. They actually act as if they were really Mork & Mindy.

You also have to think about all the hearts your going to break if you take the show off the air. The guys are turned on by Mindy's good looks, good humor and magnetic personality. The girls are all nuts about Mork because he is so hallarious and also nice looking. He looks like the kind of guy who is fun to be with.

Please consider all these points before making your final decision. My friends and I are keeping our fingers crossed. We really want you to keep the show on the air.

Yours sincerely,

A Mork & Mindy fan

The degrees of sophistication exhibited in these responses are probably characteristic of the range which confronted the readers of the grade 8 scripts. Fairly evidently, the readers' holistic scores were much influenced by the content of the letters, by the arguments attempted and the tone adopted. Inevitably, as students attempted more sophisticated arguments, they encountered more severe syntactic and rhetorical problems. Probably this factor was taken into account semiconsciously in the holistic scoring.

The writer of the first response has no argument to advance except personal preference and a knowledge of 'allot of people who like the show very much,' but does show a sense of audience and makes an engaging direct appeal.

The second response reveals a stronger sense of audience and uses emotional appeal. The arguments are extended but not greatly expanded. The final paragraph betrays a feeling which most of us have probably experienced when dealing with officialdom.

In the third response the sense of audience is reduced; the writer, however, seems to be making use of the opportunity to explore ideas, and the recognition of an opposing point of view and the use of analogy in the fourth paragraph is a signal of thinking maturity. The letter contains contradictions and incomplete thoughts, but the intention to think and present a rational case is clearly evident.

The response scored as 4 has a degree of sophistication which borders occasionally on the precocious. The arguments are rational and well organized, and the tone expresses a confidence in writing to unknown adults which is unusual at this grade level. While rewarding the competence of this writer, however, one may find the potential of the previous writer more interesting.

The difference in mechanics is not as pronounced as in the grade 5 responses, and this is probably true of the majority of the grade 8 compositions. This report will return to this point in the section on analytical scoring.

Although the mean of the holistic scores was lower in grade 8 than in the other grades, this should not necessarily be taken as evidence of inferior performance. Many of the 'defects' in the grade 8 responses are clearly the result of inexperience in dealing with this mode of composition, particularly when there is no prior opportunity for discussion and for the oral expansion and sorting out of ideas.

GRADE 11

The following response was scored as 1 by two readers:

No address given

Dear Sir,

On hearing that your television show is in much danger of being cancelled and I am very concerned. Your show is not recomended as family viewing but I think your show is very good. I am going to miss your show very much and if I could do something right now to keep your show on the air, I would do it. Many people in this area never miss it every time it comes on. I think if anyone does not like the show they can go to their T.V and switch the station or turn it off.

Sincerly Yours

The following response was scored as 2 by two readers:

Address given

Dear Sir:

On looking at the list of shows that are in danger of being cancelled. I agree in that some of them should be cancelled, but there is one show that should stay on and the name of that show is Backstreet. The show is based on the life of a cop trying to clean up in a dunpy part of town.

Like other shows this one has volince, guns, killing but they use it to a miminain. There is one thing different in this show that gets people, the cop is also a family man and has problems at home just like eveyday people.

This show does not discrante against Black or other people plus it has people using the flush you don't see that in other shows or movies. It is easy to understand, and it shows what its like to live on the poor side of town, what it realy is in real life. I can't tell you what to do but the facts above show that I would like to see the show stay on.

Yours truly,

The following response was scored as 3 by two readers:

No address given

Dear Sir;

Due to no disrespect to your dicission, I feel the telivision program you wish to cancel should be left on for viewing perposes.

Some families may indied find it unsuitable but our family gets great pleasure from watching it. The acting quality is very good and shows comedy, romance, and other emotional traits in the stories that are in the show. If families find it not suitable to watch, they have other programs

to choose from. They shouldn't be able to destroy the enjoyment of others because of their personal opinion.

People may say the dialect used is not the best, this is true at times but there are worse shows on the air than this particular one.

If all the shows were taken off because they were thought to be 'unsuitable' by some people there wouldn't be much let to choose from.

The things that interest me in this show are: the fashion of clothes worn by the actors, the comedy, the realistic plots, the disappointments and how they are delt with, and the closeness of the friends on this show.

Some shows have very unrealistic plots and are found very hard to believe but this show seems like something that could realy happen or has.

These are my points of view on the cancellation of the show and I would like to request that it stay on the air.

Sincerely yours,

P.S. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. Please take my opinion, that the show should be left on, into consideration.

The following two responses were each scored as 4 by two readers:

No address given

Mr. J. Jones,
c/o CTV Television Network,
234 Main Street,
Moncton, N.B

Dear Mr. Jones,

In regards to recent controversy over the show 'Anonymous', I feel obliged to say that I am one hundred percent in favour of your decision to take it off the air. I have felt for some time that it is unfit for youngsters, and I am relieved to see that something is finally being done to improve the standards of television viewing.

I am sure you are well aware of the various studies being carried out researching the effects of television violence on children, and have taken the results into mind when you suggested the termination of the series, 'Anonymous.'

Being of the younger generation myself, I have seen the corruption of today's youth, and feel sure that they are motivated by the television 'heroes' they idolize.

Young children fail to realize the reality in situations similar to those viewed on T.V., where people never die but to be seen again in one half hour on another show.

Although I am opposed to the airing of several programs, I still enjoy the television and by co-ordinating the efforts of people such as you and others concerned, I am confident that television viewing can be made, once more, entertaining for the entire family

In closing, I wish to say again that I, and many others, appreciate your courage to stand up and take action. You have my support.

Yours Truly

No address given

Dear Sir:

I have only recently learned of your decision to cancel the program 'As the Stomach Turns'. I know that, as the manager of our local station, you have a responsibility to provide programs that are enjoyable to all, however, if a program is unsuitable for family viewing, parents know how to change the channel on their television sets. I strongly feel that this show should remain on the air. Possibly you could air it at a later time, a time more suitable for adult viewing. This along with a

brief statement as to the adult nature of this program, should alert parents to the contents of 'As the Stomach Turns' and allow their children to watch something else or leave the room while the adults, who can judge for themselves as to what they watch on television, enjoy a good program.

In my experience, I have found that children take statements from this program at face value; it is the reactions of adults watching 'As the Stomach Turns' that causes these youngsters to wonder just what was meant.

Also, for the older children, if they have no way to chose for themselves what is 'suitable' for them to watch, then how, in later years, will they be able to decide what is really 'unsuitable'.

Young children have their morning television programs, schoolage children have their late afternoon and early evening viewing hours. Is it unreasonable that adults wish to view one program, one night a week, on <u>their</u> level?

I hope that this letter will be taken into consideration when your final decision is made.

Sincerely,

Clearly, once again, the extent and quality of the arguments presented were a major influence on the scorers' reaction. The responses range from the limited, essentially egocentric protest which was scored as 1 to the well developed arguments moving confidently between generalities and specifics, which were scored as 4. It is worth noting that these superior responses, while they reveal a capacity for controlled, dispassionate reasoning, certainly do not lack conviction.

The responses which were scored as 2 and 3 also have some of these qualities, but neither writer is able to move out from the specifics of the show and identify the issue, except by implication. The writer of the response scored as 3, however, is able to consider alternatives and hypothesizes quite confidently.

The lower scoring responses also contain more mechanical flaws, but more important, probably, is the evidence of awkward syntax, unnatural idiom, and restricted vocabulary.

It is hoped that any reader taking an overview of the examples printed here may be rather impressed and encouraged by the maturation of thinking and of language performance which, in spite of, or with the help of, our efforts does seem to occur between the beginning of grade 5 and the beginning of grade 11, and particularly where the growth can be seen most clearly between grade 8 and grade 11.

THE ANALYTICAL SCORING

Following the holistic scoring, a sub-sample of the responses was subjected to detailed syntactic and mechanical analysis. This sub-sample comprised 143 responses (10%) in grade 5, 182 responses (12%) in grade 8, and 298 responses (25%) in grade 11; the correlation between the sample and the sub-sample in terms of mean holistic score, distribution of scores and course level proved extremely high. The instructions given to the scorers were essentially similar to those used in 1977; all scoring was checked by experienced scorers to ensure consistency and accuracy. The sample and the scores may be presumed valid.

This exercise yielded a large volume of statistical information; that which appears to be most relevant will be reported here.

By and large, the results confirmed the finding of the 1977 analysis. One index, the measure of delays per T-unit, was regretfully discarded due to shortage of time and personnel. For ease of reference and comparison, the results in the two years are here printed face to face. The reader's attention is especially drawn to the significant differences between grades 8 and 11, where very similar tasks are being attempted.

SUMMARY 1977

	Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 11
Score	4.72	4.72	5.22
Length in words	123.7	93.0	206.5
Paragraphing percentage	24	25	82*
Words per T-unit	9.31	13.23*	15.33*
Words per clause	6.52	7.76*	8.18
Clauses per T-unit	1.42	1.73*	1.89
Delays per T-unit	0.16	0.11*	0.19
Run-ons per T-unit	0.17	0.11*	0.05
Fragments per T-unit	0.03	0.06	0.01
Non-agreements per clause	0.02	0.005	0.009
Incorrect verb forms per clause	0.03	0.04	0.017
Faulty pronoun reference per T-unit	0.04	0.05	0.07
Case errors per clause	0.003	0.006	0.0007
Adjective/adverb confusion per clause	0.003	0.01	0.006
Spelling error percentage	5.52	3.27*	1.76

* Differences from previous grade are statistically significant at or beyond the .05 level.

SUMMARY 1978

	Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 11
Score	5.07	4.79	5.31
Length in words	126	150*	200*
Paragraphing percentage	22	47*	73*
Words per T-unit	8.50	12.12*	16.36*
Words per clause	6.40	7.07	8.64*
Clauses per T-unit	1.31	1.75*	1.96*
Run-ons per T-unit	0.20	0.11*	0.06*
Fragments per T-unit	0.02	0.03	0.03
Non-agreements per clause	0.02	0.01	0.007*
Incorrect verb forms per clause	0.02	0.02	0.007*
Faulty pronoun reference per T-unit	0.01	0.03*	0.04
Case errors per clause	0.01	0.002	0.003
Adjective/adverb confusion per clause	0.004	,0.003	0.007
Spelling error percentage	6.43	3.99*	2.07*

* Difference from previous grade is statistically significant at or beyond the .05 level.

Length in words

The increase in length is significant at all grade levels. The fact that Grade 8 students were able to write appreciably longer compositions in 1978 may be accounted for by their having 10 minutes longer writing time than in the previous year or by the nature of the topic.

Paragraphing present

This measure aimed simply to discover whether students used the convention of indenting. No attempt was made to assess the unity of individual paragraphs. The significant increases in frequency of use may be related to length, as may the 'improvement' in grade 8 over the 1977 performance.

Words per T-unit

A T-unit was defined as a main clause together with everything subordinated to it or embedded in it. Co-ordinated clauses, where the subject of the verb was either changed or repeated, were counted as independent T-units.

As in 1977, significant increases occurred at each grade level.

Words per clause

The reduction in significant maturation between grades 8 and 5 should be noted. One would have predicted growth in grade 8, but it may be that the difference in the mode of composition is responsible. Another factor may have been

the frequent use of short introductory clauses such as 'I hear that....', 'I think that...', 'I hope that....'. In any case, it should be noted that the significant increase in T-unit length is related to the increase in use of subordinate clauses and not, apparently, to other embedding devices. In grade 11, on the other hand, part, at least, of the increased length of T-unit must be due to embedding.

Clauses per T-unit

The increase is significant this year at all grade levels.

Run-ons per T-unit

This measure identifies the apparent failure of a student to recognize the termination of a sentence either by the use of a period or of a capital letter.

The larger sample in 1978 shows that the decline in frequency is significant at all levels. Expressed differently, the figures mean that grade 5 students were correctly identifying the conclusion of a sentence 80% of the time, grade 8 students 89% of the time, and grade 11 students 94% of the time.

Fragments per T-unit

This measure identifies syntactically incomplete units such as subordinate clauses or phrases which have been punctuated by the student as if they were complete sentences. Interjections, exclamations and 'incomplete' constructions deliberately used for rhetorical effect were not regarded as fragments.

There was no significant difference in the frequency between the grades, the error occurring twice or three times in every 100 complete sentences attempted.

Non-agreements per clause

The non-agreement studied here is between subject and verb 'we was wondering', 'one of my friends were', etc.

The frequency of error declines at each grade level, significantly between grade 5 and grade 11. It occurs twice in every 100 clauses in grade 5, once in every 100 clauses in grade 8 and seven times in every 1000 clauses in grade 11.

Incorrect verb-forms per clause

This measure records usage errors, mainly relating to tense forms - 'I seen', 'I had went'.

The incidence is very similar to that of non-agreements, and the decline is significant in grade 11.

Faulty pronoun reference per T-unit

This very limited test of coherence gives predictable results; students, as might be expected, commit more errors as they attempt longer and more complex structures.

Case errors per clause

Case errors involve mainly pronouns - 'between you and I,' 'me and my friends are very upset',

The frequency of error was so low that no significant differences emerged.

Adverb/adjective confusion per clause

Again the low incidence reveals no significant differences.

Percentage of spelling errors

Included as spelling errors were failure to capitalize proper nouns, omission of quotation marks and misuse of the apostrophe.

The decline in frequency of error is significant at all grade levels. The following table shows the distribution of errors by type.

	Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 11
Homonyms	14	14	10
Phonetic Substitutions	23	15	17
Pronunciation	4	5	5
Unclassified	10.5	11	9
Omissions	16	15	14
Insertions	6.5	8	7
Transpositions	4	4	5
Doubling	6	8	11
Apostrophe	6	7	9
Capitalization	6	4	3
Quotation	0	3	3
Separation	4	6	7

The percentages are based on 1267 recorded errors in grade 5, 868 in grade 8 and 944 in grade 11.

The general pattern of errors is substantially similar to that observed in the 1977 responses. Inflections, classified separately in the previous year, were included as omissions in 1978. The increase in capitalization errors may be explained by the topics, which required frequent reference to names and titles. For the same reason, the absence of quotation marks or underlining to signify a title was recorded as a separate classification. The substantial increase in the incidence of errors involving homonyms in grade 8 is significant and should be noted by teachers.

Although it proved possible this year to reduce the percentage of 'unclassified' errors, the analysts still experienced difficulty with many spellings which contained multiple errors or which resulted from carelessness, or sometimes sheer despair!

Difficulty was encountered too in determining which errors probably had their origin in habitual mispronunciation: the fairly common misspelling <u>vilence</u>, for example, could be classified as an omission, but is probably related to mispronunciation.

The somewhat frustrating task of identifying, recording, and analysing spelling errors was fortunately once again relieved by occasional humour. It is, for example, good to know that the school meal service offers such delights as hotchoqolat and spraggity, and that one may even dine by the light of a sham doolear to the accompaniment of uklelaylies. One is also encouraged to note that some princables impose a penaldey for the misuse of pordables!

Comparison between level 1 & 2 and level 3 students in grade 11

The large sub-sample (25%) in grade 11 is explained by the desire of the researchers to examine more carefully the differences implied by the 1977 study. The following table shows the 1978 results.

	Levels 1 & 2	Level 3
Score	5.70	4.78*
Length in words	222	178*
Paragraphing percentage	82	64*
Words per T-unit	16.26	16.28
Words per clause	8.47	8.73
Clauses per T-unit	1.94	2.04
Run-ons per T-unit	0.04	0.09*
Fragments per T-unit	0.03	0.04
Non-agreements per clause	0.005	0.01*
Incorrect verb forms per clause	0.006	0.01
Faulty pronoun reference per T-unit	0.03	0.06*
Case errors per clause	0.003	0.003
Adjective/adverb confusion per clause	0.001	0.007*
Spelling error percentage	1.67	2.22*

*Difference is significant at or beyond the .05 level.

It should be noted that the indices of syntactic maturity show no significant difference, though there is a significant difference in the incidence of run-on sentences and faulty pronoun references. Also significant are the differences in score, length, and the incidence of paragraphing, non-agreements, adjective/adverb confusion and spelling errors.

Comparison of high-scoring and low scoring responses

In an attempt to determine to what extent the indices under analytic study relate to the holistic score, comparisons were made between responses which received a score of 7 or 8 and 2 or 3 at each grade level. The following table demonstrates the results.

	Grade 5		Grade 8		Grade 11	
	Low Scoring	High Scoring	Low Scoring	High Scoring	Low Scoring	High Scoring
Length in words	88	168*	102	208*	134	241*
Paragraphing present %	12	27	20	77*	47	83*
Words per T-unit	8.19	8.78	12.56	12.12	16.60	16.29
Words per clause	6.30	6.49	6.71	7.74*	8.31	8.85
Clauses per T-unit	1.26	1.36	1.88	1.64	2.04	1.87
Run-ons per T-unit	0.28	0.16*	0.16	0.07*	0.11	0.03*
Fragments per T-unit	0.02	0.01	0.06	0.02	0.07	0.02*
Non-agreements per clause	0.05	0.008	0.02	0.006	0.007	0.003
Incorrect verb forms per clause	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.01*	0.01	0.003*
Faulty pronoun reference per clause	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.06	0.03*
Case errors per clause	0.03	0.003	0.001	0.002	0.003	0.003
Adjective/adverb confusion per clause	0.01	0.01	0.003	0.002	0.004	0.003
Spelling error percentage	9.18	3.14*	6.05	2.08*	4.17	1.17*

*Difference is significant at or beyond the .05 level.

In interpreting these results, the size of the sample and the low incidence of error in some categories indicate the need for caution. The reader will note that, in some instances, what appear to be considerable differences cannot be regarded as statistically significant.

The reader should also note that all that the study indicates is that certain features are characteristic of low-scoring and high-scoring responses. It does not necessarily follow that these characteristics determine the score.

The only three indices which emerge as significant at all three grade levels are length, incidence of run-on sentences and frequency of spelling errors. Interestingly, these are the only significant indices in grade 5.

The use of paragraphing and the incidence of incorrect verb forms appear as significant differences in grade 8 and 11.

Words per clause emerges as a significant factor in grade 8 only, and clauses per T-unit, fragments per T-unit, and faulty pronoun reference gain significance in grade 11.

It would appear, perhaps, that the significance of syntactic characteristics as a discriminator between low-scoring and high-scoring responses increases as the grades advance. However, it should be noted that the length of T-unit, generally considered the best indicator of syntactic maturity (and significant in the comparison of grade means), is nowhere significant in this study in a comparison of low and high scores, at the same grade level.

This result may perhaps reinforce a recent study by Michael Clark and Richard Bailey at the University of Michigan among freshman students, which found no significant difference between the mean length of T-units in 'low-grade' and 'high-grade' student writing.

The general pattern which emerges from our own analysis is confirmed by the regression of variables which was used to determine the most accurate predictors of holistic score. At all three grade levels the length of the response was the most powerful single predictor, accounting for 21% of the variance of the grade 5 scores, 16% of the variance in grade 8 and 23% of the variance in grade 11 scores.

In grade 5, length was followed by spelling errors, run-ons, paragraphing, adjective/adverb confusion, non-agreements and words per clause.

In grade 8, the presence of paragraphing (probably related to length) is the second best predictor, followed by verb errors, words per clause, fragments per T-unit, run-ons per T-unit and percentage of spelling errors.

In grade 11, as in grade 5, spelling again emerged as the second best predictor, followed by pronoun reference, course level, fragments, run-ons, the presence of paragraphing and case errors. The syntactic indices are the least useful in predicting score.

The reader will understand that these figures do not indicate that the low predictors are unimportant, but that they are virtually evenly distributed among low-scoring and high-scoring responses. For example, if, as this report has already suggested, low achieving students write as long and as complex sentences as high achieving students, then clearly these factors will not emerge as predictors. Conversely, improving the spelling of the low scorers would reduce the value of spelling as a predictor, but it would not <u>necessarily</u> improve the holistic score.

The holistic score is clearly determined by a great many factors, of which, our predictors are accounting for only 34% of the variance in grade 5 scores, 36% of the variance in grade 8 scores, and 38% of the variance in grade 11 scores.

One may hypothesize that if we had included vocabulary as one of our indices we would have significantly increased the proportion of accountable variance. Unfortunately, we did not have the means to conduct a vocabulary count on this occasion.

There are then three major ways of looking at the statistics produced by this analysis. We can look at them in absolute terms and say that on this particular occasion, in response to this rhetorical task, a representative sample of New Brunswick students used, on average, so many words, wrote clauses of such and such a length, committed this or that percentage of spelling errors, and so on.

We can look at them in comparative terms either between grades or between course levels.

We can also look at the individual indices in terms of the scores awarded by a group of adults, who may fairly represent several components in the educational institution, but mainly the actual class-room. These adults, the reader is reminded, were invited to make only a broad, general and perhaps largely intuitive response to the compositions, not to make calculated judgments based on any specific criteria. Nor was any attempt made to pre-determine the criteria which the readers should employ other than to ensure that the purpose and audience of the assignment were understood.

By looking at the statistics in these ways we may hope to draw some valid, if tentative, inferences relevant to the design of curriculum and the nature of instruction. It is with these matters that the final section of this report will be concerned.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

The information contained in this report may be useful at several levels of research and administration; however, this section of the report will address itself mainly to implications for curriculum and instruction. It is, after all, from the efforts of practising teachers and their students that the information mainly derives and it is to them that it should be returned for re-investment. As a backdrop to specific reaction on this information some general comments may be in order.

Many interpretations can no doubt be placed on the statistical evidence provided. However, in one respect the evidence appears to be incontrovertible: the responses under study do manifest clear and, to some extent, measurable maturation in thinking capacities and in the ability to express thought in writing. Taken in conjunction, the results of the holistic and analytical scoring should attest to the satisfaction of any intelligent and informed reader that the composition of our students reveals strong and sometimes dramatic growth between the beginning of year five and the beginning of year eleven, at least in the area under study.

One important benefit which accrues from studies such as this is that they enable us to respond to criticism from the universities, business interests, and general public with the assurance that, whatever else may be happening to students in the course of their schooling, they are not standing still. They are growing in a number of important respects, and we, for our part, are slowly devising the language which we need accurately to describe this growth.

While making this claim, however, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the limitations of our knowledge. Impressive as the work of recent and contemporary scholarship is, our knowledge of cognitive growth and of the ways in which it is related to composition is still inadequate. It is to be hoped that our own study, in promoting dialogue among teachers and giving local professional currency to a potentially useful, though limited, language, may lend some modest assistance to an increase in knowledge and understanding.

Another limitation on our knowledge is a definition of reasonable expectations for written composition at different grade levels and stages of growth. Too often, as was pointed out in the preface to this report, expectations are based on unrealistic adult standards which, if they do not actually impede instruction and growth, are quite irrelevant to it.

As we build a soundly researched basis of data, and as we expand our dialogue about composition and the premises on which we base our evaluation, we shall resolve this problem within the profession, but the task of educating and convincing the public will still be with us.

A third limitation is still more challenging, and that is our present inability to relate performance to teaching practices and teacher style. It might be somewhat comforting to believe that the evident growth in New Brunswick students could be attributed unequivocally to the curriculum as written, or to a particular style of teaching. However, we know that there are at least as many approaches to English curriculum in practice as there are schools in the province, and the best that the authors of the present language arts and English programs can hope is that something of the attitudes implicit in the current courses has contributed to what appears to be the fairly healthy language growth of New Brunswick students.

In view of these limitations, the teacher of English has still frequently to rely on gut-instinct, but this instinct can, at least, be better informed than it was twenty years ago. There is no real need for English teachers to continue to be perpetuators of myths and slaves to shibboleths. In particular it would be a renunciation of professional responsibility to close our eyes to emerging knowledge about language and

composition, and about the practices which may promote its growth. We cannot shelter from the hard thinking and resolution required for advancement through a regression to what we know to be sterile attitudes and time-wasting practices. The productive elements in traditional English teaching should be preserved, but they must be modified and expanded by new understandings as they become available.

When we look at the representative samples of student writing reproduced in Section One, the first thing that should be recognized is that when students are given a rhetorical task to which they can relate, in terms of both purpose and audience, most of them are able to respond with considerable confidence and linguistic competence. Their responses are flawed in many ways according to the adult standards of critics who have themselves forgotten perhaps how inept in thought and expression they were themselves at that age, and, worse, who cannot sometimes themselves emulate the standards of expression which they require of students. Moreover, it is only at the desks of students and secretaries that these standards of expression are applied with such rigor - not on blackboards, not in personal inter-departmental communications, and certainly not in the general oral concourse of either the classroom or the business office.

The habitual conversation of many 'educated' adults is liberally strewn with 'would of gone's' and 'had of went's', with 'between you and I's' and 'Me and my friends', with double negatives and dangling participles, not to mention many nicer points of grammar and rhetoric. This is the oral language of 'educated' people and it can be heard in business offices and school staff-rooms as well as, more frequently, in more relaxed social situations.

To say that the conditions and standards which apply to oral conversation are different from those which apply to written communication (which, of course, they are) is, <u>from the point of view of language development</u>, only begging the question, for it is oral language not written language, which is the major influence on the language patterns of elementary and junior high school students. If some teachers, parents and the general public wish to apply impeccable 'grammatical' standards to the written composition of children and young adolescents, then they should be prepared to edit their own conversation or to supply their students and children with very sound reasons why they should not use, in their writing, patterns which they hear frequently in their schools and homes.

Yet, in spite of the tolerance of 'error' in oral communication, the incidence of such usage is remarkably low in the writing examined in this study. By some means, students are being persuaded in written communication to avoid deviations which would generally pass unnoticed or would be tolerated in general speech. More importantly, they are also learning, by and large, to write sentences, to expand and convey their thinking through the use of various syntactic devices, and even to improve their spelling as they move through the school system. In short, they are learning to put pen to paper in what the world might consider a generally understandable and acceptable way. Still more significantly, they are making themselves intelligible on paper in a way which is commensurate with their age, so that a sensitive reader might respond: 'Well, it's not correct, perhaps - but I like the way they say it.' And there is a way in which children express thoughts on paper at their unique stage of growth which is to be valued, and valued very highly, because they are using language to explore experience and ideas and to reveal their thinking in a way which adults, who have learned the sophisticated techniques available to disguise their thoughts, rarely do. And this is a deeper reason why adult standards of expression are so inapplicable to the writing of children.

The impression formed by the chief reader was that the holistic scorers, by and large, took into account the conditions imposed by the rhetorical task, and tried genuinely to listen to what the students had to say without allowing mechanical errors unnecessarily to impede the statement of thought and feeling. At the same time, their final judgment was properly conditioned by some reference to usage and mechanics and to the influence which these factors might exert on the intended audience. In this sense, they constituted a good audience for student writers and one in which students might learn in the classroom to place sensible trust.

SPECIFIC FACTORS

Having made these general observations, we may examine more specifically the information provided by this study.

Looking first at the absolute results, it is difficult, in the absence of truly parallel studies either in the past or in other contexts at present, to make firm judgments or strong assertions. Probably the most that can be said is that, in terms of general language performance, particularly with respect to usage and mechanics, our study supports the findings in other provinces - Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia - that the concern expressed for the deterioration of standards is much exaggerated.

Certainly the student writing evaluated and analysed in this study is not replete with errors in any general terms, though the low-scoring responses do exhibit a high incidence of usage and spelling faults; there is also a bias towards this type of error in the responses of level 3 grade 11 students.

USAGE

One's experience of the classroom informs one that usage errors in particular are closely related to the habitual oral language used in the home and social environment. It is, of course, a part of the business of the school to cultivate standard usage practices in written composition, but this should be done without pedantic nit-picking and without impeding fluency. Probably many of the problems experienced, especially by younger children, in achieving a free vigorous flow of language on paper are caused by undue worry about what are comparatively petty aspects of usage.

Something can be done to remedy sub-standard usage through direct instruction used humanely and with discrimination, but is is likely that the internalization of standard usage will be achieved only through consistent enrichment in school of the oral and written language environment.

SPELLING

A high incidence of spelling errors also tends to occur in the low-scoring and level 3 responses, but probably not for the same reasons. The strongest single influence on spelling seems to be visual memory, and over and over again one sees students attempting phonetic representations of words of which they clearly have no visual record. To be able to sound out a word (provided that the habitual pronunciation is accurate) can indeed be helpful, but unless there is reinforcement from the visual memory the proneness to error remains.

The main source of spelling problems seems to be words which do not conform to regular phonetic rules. Teachers at every grade level should recognize that such words must be presented visually and that great care must be taken, especially at the initial presentation, to ensure that the student forms an accurate visual impression of the word. Where the correct pronunciation of the word would supply additional assistance, teachers should be careful always to pronounce the word themselves with precision.

Homonyms, which are another major source of error, also require visual presentation. The key to success here, however, seems to lie in persuading students to make a permanent connection between the object (concept) and its visual representation. Good spellers do not write'hole'

for 'whole' because, when they see the symbol 'hole', they 'see' something quite different from its homonym.

The miswriting of some homonyms, however, ('to' for 'too', for example) may be attributed to initial haste, and it is possible that the opportunity for editing and re-writing would eliminate many such errors. In one grade 8 response, for instance, a student wrote 223 words and committed 5 errors - 'thing' for 'think', 'it' for 'is', 'to' for 'too', 'that' for 'than', and 'with' for 'will'. In this case, haste is clearly the culprit.

Some of the observed errors are susceptible to treatment by the application of rules, especially doubling and dropping the final 'e' before adding '__ing'. 'Writen' and 'writeing' were common errors in both grade 8 and grade 11. Teachers in grade 10, especially, might make a point of reviewing these rules and others if they discover that errors of this kind are frequent.

The attention of the Department of Education, and especially of the Elementary curriculum advisory committee, is drawn to a particular problem in this regard, arising from the different forms of British and American spelling. Many students spelled the infinitive 'cancel' with a double 'l', possibly transposing the spelling from the participial form 'cancelled' in the assignment instructions. Since students have no

doubt seen the spelling 'canceled' in American (and some Canadian) printed matter, their confusion is understandable. Similarly, the spellings 'program' and 'programme' may be equally acceptable, but the hybrid 'programe' (a frequent error) is not. Once confusions of this kind are established, they are often difficult to eradicate; for this reason, the initial presentation of the doubling rules and practices needs special attention.

Probably the New Brunswick Department of Education has moved sensibly to make a spelling program once again available in the elementary grades, especially as the program itself is quite enlightened. However, unless the memory of the words learned is exercised, little will likely be achieved. Teachers and administrators would do well to heed the words of a discerning but rather puzzled 7th grade student who observed: 'I do really well in Spelling - but I still can't spell.'

The Department of Education is also urged to make available to teachers at all grade levels a copy of the common-sense book Teaching Diagnostic Spelling, by Ves Thomas, on the basis of whose research our own study was made.

SYNTAX

The absence of true norms makes absolute judgment on syntactic performance impossible. One sometimes hears the findings of Hunt, Mellon and O'Hare cited as norms, but to do this is to make some very rash assumptions, especially about the samples used in their studies. There is also some doubt about the statistical stability of the T-unit as an index; that is to say there is no guarantee that performance on one occasion is characteristic of general competence or performance, especially in different modes of composition.

Probably the most useful information deriving from our study is the evidence of similar competence among low-scoring and high-scoring students, and among students enrolled in different course levels in grade 11. This seems to imply that the factors which result in syntactic growth are not those which produce differences in the areas of usage and spelling.

That syntactic growth, at least as we are measuring it, can be accelerated seems to have been demonstrated fairly firmly by Mellon, O'Hare and others. Whether it should be accelerated and how much value the exercise of sentence combining has is still open to debate.

The author of the 1977 report on syntax and mechanics expressed some reservations, shared incidentally by both Mellon and O'Hare, about the use of sentence combining. The main danger is that the teaching profession may see the device as a panacea; one sensed something of this kind of reaction at the 1979 annual conference of the CCTE, in spite of O'Hare's own repeated warnings that sentence-combining is 'only one small slice of the pie'.

The results of its over-use, its isolated use, or its use at the expense of other aspects of language instruction could be that students end up with a more sophisticated vehicle for thinking but with few thoughts to express.

The same may perhaps be said of the device of structural markers, as advocated, for example, by Carl Bereiter. Structural markers provide students with a format for their thinking in the development, for instance, of a paragraph -'I have often wondered .....Perhaps, if things were different ..... On the other hand.....' and so on. Bereiter suggests that if we supply students with the language (or structure) of thought, we may find that the thought is there.

The point is well-taken, but it should not be over-taken. Playing with language structures in any form (and there should be a variety of forms) is a useful class-room activity, certainly much more productive, if one's objective is to improve syntax, than any formal grammatical instruction and analytical exercises.

However, such play is only one activity among many, and should be used with discretion, related where possible to the perceived needs of students, and always, always embedded in a much larger learning context.

COMPARATIVE RESULTS

When we turn to the comparisons between grades, in all the areas under analytical study, we can be somewhat less tentative than in our discussion of absolutes. There is clear evidence of growth in syntactic maturity; there is an unmistakable decline in the incidence of spelling faults and several usage errors. Sentence sense develops, and the incidence of run-on sentences reduces significantly at each grade level studied. What are commonly cited as problems in written expression are not eliminated but they do decline.

And this statement is true of both low-scoring and high-scoring responses, and of both course level categories in grade 11.

The somewhat limited increase in clause length between grade 5 and 7 should be examined more carefully. It may imply that students in grades 6 and 7 would benefit from a curriculum unit designed to promote syntactic maturation in this respect.

The sub-committees for language arts at these grade levels are requested to consider this possibility. A similar unit might also be designed for use in grade 10, where, at least in the 102 program, it might complement the objective study of grammar recommended at this level.

Such units might help to promote greater confidence and facility in the use of complex structures and reduce the incidence of incoherence and awkwardness in the syntax of expository writing. It is also possible that the exercising of short term memory in combining sentences may improve reading abilities.

On the whole, however, present curriculum and teaching practices appear to be achieving measurable success in the limited area of syntax, usage and mechanics. The results of this study, as well as our broader knowledge of language growth, indicate that there is no justification for a return to analytical grammar, and while some students may benefit from drill-type practices in usage and mechanics, such practices should be selective with respect both to the items chosen for instruction and the students themselves. In no circumstances should such exercises be introduced in isolation nor at the expense of the opportunity for general language enrichment afforded by the present program.

FACTORS NOT ANALYSED

A consideration of the relationship between the findings of the analytical study and the holistic scores raises larger issues which cannot at present be resolved but must be confronted. The reader is reminded that the indices in the analytical study appeared to account for only one third of the factors affecting the holistic score, and of these indices the length of the composition was easily the most significant. One of the dangers of the kind of study we have made is that it may give undue emphasis to syntax, usage and mechanics and divert attention from other factors which, in fact, are more influential in determining how we respond to and evaluate student composition. We have, therefore, to address ourselves to the factors which our analytical study does not attempt to quantify.

The significance of length of composition suggests rather obviously that what students have to say and their ability or willingness to expand their ideas is a very important consideration. Expansion of ideas occurs in a 'yes, but...' and a 'yes, and ....' type of dialogue situation, whether that dialogue is external or internal - inside one's own head. It rarely occurs in a totally negative situation - there are many ways of saying no, but none of them leads far towards any expansion of thinking. It is rather noticeable that students who come from homes and communities in which the climate is aggressive and dogmatic experience great difficulty in engaging in constructive dialogue. The tendency of the media to polarize every public and political situation is a further detrimental influence on productive thinking.

It follows that the schools have a major responsibility to redress these shortcomings in domestic and public discourse. There is probably a need for a great deal more constructive dialogue in our classrooms prior to any attempt at written composition. (This comment, of course, points also to one of the weaknesses in our writing assessment program). The quality of the dialogue, however, is much more important than the quantity. If the dialogue consists virtually in the teacher and perhaps a few 'bright' students dictating what is right, what is to be written, then it is unlikely that it will lead to much advancement in thinking or expansion of ideas.

On the other hand, it is also important that students be encouraged to adopt a firm stance in relation to whatever transactional task (such as the letter to the T.V. station manager) they are asked to undertake. It was pointed out in the comments on the superior responses to the grade 11 assignment, that they exhibited this quality of conviction and, at the same time, took into account other points of view and remained, to a degree, tentative in their attitude and conciliatory in their tone.

The instructional basis for the development of these attributes, as far as the school is concerned, probably consists in a favourable climate of daily dialogue established by the teacher - an enormously difficult accomplishment. It may also consist in the opportunities allowed for the heuristic use of language, that is to say for the use of language to explore experience and ideas freed from the pressures of audience and evaluation, the use of language as an instrument of learning. It is in this regard that journal writing may have such an important role to play, at every grade level, in the development of competence in written composition.

Senior, elementary and junior high school teachers have a special role to play in this regard, and there is no question in this writer's mind that the years of adolescence require,

and the teachers involved through these years deserve, very special consideration. To these teachers falls the onerous task of leading students from an essentially egocentric mode of thinking to the kind of intellectual behaviour which we begin to regard as 'adult'. Moreover, teachers have to do this at a time when the students are experiencing severe social and emotional pressures. It is no help to these teachers if 'senior' colleagues and the public at large insist on applying adult standards which are irrelevant to the situation.

Teachers in senior high school should begin to place much less emphasis on what students 'know' about language, and much more on the attitudes which they bring to discussion and writing, and the aptitude which they show for mature intellectual dialogue. The students whose responses were considered superior in grade 11 did not produce these responses as a result of what they learned in senior high school; they did so as the result of a long hard process of growth over many years of schooling. And there are no short-cuts to this achievement. The process is not one which can be defined exclusively in terms of knowledge or skills; it incorporates an attitude of mind, the secret of which is subtle and elusive.

Part of our search then is for a language which will define this secret. The work of such scholars as James Britton and James Moffett provides us with the beginnings of a definition, and more teachers should be familiar with it. However, it is in the adjustment and application of such knowledge to the classroom situation that any real hope for progress consists. The problems of classroom teachers cannot be resolved by decisions made or curriculum implemented at an administrative level, though the sympathetic understanding of administrators and curriculum-makers may facilitate their efforts. In particular, it is necessary for administrators to listen to informed advice from within the teaching profession, and it is in this respect that the greatest potential of the N. B. Writing Assessment program lies.

Having made these rather political comments, this report can perhaps return to its main substance, which is the writing of representative students at three grade levels in the province. The study is a serious one, and should be taken seriously. On the whole, it affirms confidence in the students, their teachers, and the program of English studies.

However, it should be recognized that the study is also limited. It surveys only one mode of writing and examines it analytically in terms of only a few of the factors implicit in the evaluation of written composition. It leaves many questions unanswered, but, it is hoped, a little more clearly defined. It recommends a few possible improvements in curriculum and modes of instruction.

It is hoped that its most important impact may be to promote discussion and to enable teachers to develop the language needed to describe the growth, the maturation in thinking and expression, which does occur while students are in their charge in schools. Ultimately, this discussion should extend to teachers of all subjects, all of whom use language as the main vehicle of instruction and learning.

The planned extension of the N. B. Writing Assessment program in 1979 is designed to examine student performance in the narrative mode. This project raises many issues as yet unexplored, and it will be necessary to devise a different evaluative instrument. It is also intended to assess students' capacity to edit their own writing. Composition, in the normal run of things, is a muddly business; in examinations we do not allow our students much opportunity to clear up the mess, so next year the Department will provide grade 11 students, at least, with this opportunity.

In concluding, may the author of this report appeal to teachers to observe the spirit of the present provincial programs, to require more written work of their students, to ensure that the assignments are well conceived and carefully worded and that they represent a wide variety of purpose and audience. In particular, teachers at every grade level

are asked to provide opportunity for students to express themselves, using their natural idiom, in a climate of trust. James Britton's concept of expressive writing is still the most useful available definition of the essential language of growth, and indications are that students still do not get sufficient opportunity to use this language in school.

May this writer also appeal to high school teachers to re-examine the concept of 'the term paper' and 'the research project', which frequently entail a good deal of plagiarism and copying and confine students to a single mode of discourse. If these assignments are being set in the expectation that they will 'prepare' students for university studies, the expectation is unlikely to be fulfilled. Nor, incidentally, should we pay any attention to college professors, however well-intentioned, who instruct us that our principal business is to teach expository composition. Even if language growth could be confined within this restricted mode (and all informed opinion suggests that it cannot), our concern as teachers is with the much broader interests of our students. It is the view of this writer that such advice should be politely ignored.

Requesting teachers to assign more written composition in prevailing circumstances may appear unrealistic. However, the request is not really preposterous. Much good expressive writing can be done in journals if students can be encouraged

to take pride in them (and most can). Such writing may be read and receive a response to the content, but should never be 'corrected'. Writing folders may contain many compositions which the teacher has read (and 'scored' holistically if he chooses) but which are not intensively corrected. They may also contain other compositions to which the teacher has given considerable analytical attention. From this corpus the teacher, or the teacher and student jointly, can select the work needed to compile a term mark or grade.

It is not true that students hate writing and will not write except under duress. Of course, they may do so if the assignments are dull and repetitive (or if writing is conceived of and used in the school as a form of punishment -a practice which no principal should ever permit). But if the assignments are varied and well-stimulated, and if writing is a regular activity, most students (given a certain student reluctance to undertake work of any kind) address themselves to the task with reasonable enthusiasm, and even some enjoyment.

Correcting student papers is, of course, a chore (though not always without its rewards), but the teacher who is not prepared to read the writing of his students should find another occupation. Fortunately, most teachers of English are ready to accept this professional responsibility.

Since students were the main contributors to the present study, it may be fitting to allow the final word to the grade 8 student who informed the T.V. station manager that, when he heard that 'Charley's Angels' was about to be cancelled, 'he pridaner shit'. If it is any consolation, the reaction of the holistic scorers to his spelling and idiom was not dissimilar.